

All Aboard: A Reflection on Delivering a Presentation at an External Organisation

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INTRODUCTION

“Deliver at the staff development week, Champford College (pseudonym)”, had been etched in my outlook calendar for at least three months. I would have been happier if it had been lightly written in pencil, but it was a firm commitment. I did have plenty of time on my side. However, the weekly countdown adopted by most teachers during an academic year, had taken over. Regular weekly activities, interspersed with a scattering of key moments, were mapped time efficiently throughout the final leg of the academic year. There was a bustling towards that moment when the computers are turned off, classroom doors locked and some much needed (relatively guilt free) rest and recreation can begin.

DELIVERING THE PRESENTATION

So practically overnight, three months had been extinguished and the moment of no return had arrived. The journey down to Champford College was unremarkable, the hotel was drab from the outside, but had parking, was central and inside a modern urban decadence awaited me. The king size bed was also a very welcome sight and I awoke the following morning refreshed, but too nervous to eat much of what looked like a wonderful breakfast.

Standing at the front of the classroom randomly sifting through the resources I had managed to prepare in advance, I perused the room layout and it dawned on me that I hadn't taught for a while. A quick shift of chairs and tables, a play with the interactive white board and I felt about as ready as I could be, given the fact that the room was beginning to fill up and time really had run out.

A personal introduction by the principal certainly helped to raise expectations about the session and the nerves that had been buzzing for the past few days, dissolved. I decided to start with a little bit of personal history. I was hoping that it would put my views and ideas about educational matters in relation to my own experience. Our own histories are after all what shapes us in our quest to continually learn and develop as experts. It was also a good excuse to show some photographs that I had snapped while walking in the Pennines.

So why had I agreed to stand (and try and teach) in front of the entire staff team at a college I had never been to before? One of the things that I most remember about my own teacher training was one word of advice “Throw yourself in the deep end. It doesn't matter if it doesn't

work, as long as you reflect on the experience. Learn from it, you will develop and become a better teacher". My entire teaching career has been based on this premise and actually, it is about having the confidence, or rather the downright guts to try something a bit different, to challenge yourself and in turn, challenge your learners that keeps the experience fresh and alive. So standing in front of seventy members of staff, mixed in terms of age, experience, qualifications and subject areas, I certainly felt that I was in at the deep end, but loving the feeling.

Riding on adrenaline helps to keep us alive, not too much, or we can feel ill, but a little bit now and again is good. It reawakens the drive and keeps us on our toes. This is especially true for educators. When I meet a new group of trainee teachers on their first day, it is good to be reminded of how they are feeling, their anxiety, trepidation and expectations. It is useful to have an anecdote of how it feels to be in a position of fear. How to use that, how to channel it so it does not consume you, but rather empowers you as a teacher.

So what have I reflected on and considered to be the highlights of this bespoke session? Throwing in what appear to be random 'fun' tasks, can help to break up the session and re-engage learners with renewed energy. One particular task that I used in this session was a short, two minute drawing exercise. This had an unexpected element of competitiveness to it, as well as being fun. However, it was a simple and effective way to demonstrate how important it is to give learners all the information they need, in order to be successful. I like to model theory in practice. Why spend ages explaining something to a group of learners when you can get them to explore concepts through experience? This is learning in action and it is by learning through doing, in situated contexts that according to Lave and Wenger (2008), is how the most memorable learning takes place.

Making links throughout the session to individual strengths and knowledge is another good way to engage with a group and to build confidence and interactivity. An approachable manner and suitable language to match the level and experience of the learners is something that should always be present. If you lose yourself in academic language then you run the risk of excluding some of

the learners. Education and educators can be guilty of doing this. As teachers we need to try to give our own learners the language that they need to be successful and empowered to achieve independently, without over complicating things, or dumbing down either.

The final task for the session provided each group of learners with an opportunity to unpack the whole session that they had been subjected to in the morning. This worked well on different levels. The task itself was split into different elements and this demonstrated differentiation in practice. Each group fed back on a specific part of the session, according to their particular task. I told them that some of the tasks were harder and more challenging and this seemed to raise the bar for these particular groups, who responded in a positive way, tackling the task with enthusiasm. This was especially clear when the groups delivered their feedback to the whole group.

CONCLUSIONS

Giving time for self-reflection to teams and individuals within teams to discuss ideas, can feel like a luxury that, as teachers, we often discount. There are always more pressing issues that need to be dealt with. However, it is only through space that we begin to unwind the learned experiences of the past academic year so we can identify our own successes and areas that we need to develop further. Even if my session only gave birth to one idea for each lecturer, then that is enough, for now. One step at a time. After all, teaching and learning should be a long and winding journey.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and approved it for publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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